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SUBJECT: YOUTH ACTIVISTS BEATEN IN SUSPICIOUS ALTERCATION

11. (SBU) Summary. In a suspicious episode, two young, well-known Azerbaijani political activists were beaten up in public and later detained by police. Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade were accosted in a downtown Baku cafe by two burly men who provoked a physical confrontation. Milli, Hajizade and the two other men were all arrested afterward. Milli and Hajizade both had injuries requiring treatment before they could be taken to detention. Police reportedly freed the two unknown men after three hours, as well as a witness who was with Milli and Hajizade. The two activists refused to sign statements without a lawyer present and are to be held for 48 hours. The motive for the attack is not immediately clear, however Milli and Hajizade are known to be the creators of the controversial You Tube &donkey video⁸ that satirizes the Azerbaijani government. The timing of the attack is especially strange because Milli was to have worked July 10 as the interpreter for the PACE Special Rapporteur for Political Prisoners. End Summary.

12. (SBU) According to eyewitnesses, Emin Milli (founder of the youth group Alumni Network) and Adnan Hajizade (of the OL! Youth movement and son of prominent opposition politician Hikmet Hajizade) were dining in a group of seven activists at a caf in downtown Baku on the evening of July 8. Two heavily built men in tracksuits accosted them and assaulted them physically. Milli received several cuts and Hajizade had his nose broken. When police arrived on the scene, they arrested Milli, Hajizade and their assailants. The assailants reportedly apologized and were released. Milli and Hajizade were ordered detained on suspicion of hooliganism for 48 hours, the amount of time the state has to lodge charges under Azerbaijani law. During the night, activists assembled outside the police station and got into a brief scuffle with police officers but there were no further arrests.

13. (SBU) Embassy officers from the PolEcon and Public Diplomacy sections attempted to visit Milli and Hajizade in jail but were not allowed to. The police commander present told the Embassy officers that the fight began because Milli, Hajizade and their friends were drinking and conversing loudly and rudely. This offended the women who were in the company of the two men who beat Milli and Hajizade and is what sparked their confrontation. He added that on a typical night his police station downtown responds to 5-10 such complaints. The Embassy officers requested on humanitarian grounds that the detained men have access to medical care and legal advice.

14. (SBU) Human rights advocates led by Leyla Yunus of the Institute of Peace and Democracy held a press conference July 9 and alleged that Milli and Hajizade had passed the night without attention to their injuries. Yunus and 50 others signed an open letter in support of Milli and HJizade to President Aliyev. At the press conference) attended by the German Ambassador) it emerged that Milli was supposed to

have been working as the interpreter for Christoph Strasser, a Bundestag member (SPD) who is the PACE Special Rapporteur for Political Prisoners in Azerbaijan.

15. (SBU) The motive for the attack was not immediately clear, but we have no evidence that it was provoked by Milli or Hajizade. Though it is difficult to prove a connection, the attack did follow a recent controversial posting on Milli,s Facebook page. He posted a video on YouTube wherein a person in a donkey suit is interviewed about Azerbaijan. The genesis of the video was a report that the GOAJ spent USD 82000 in 2008 to import two donkeys from Germany. The person in the donkey suit represents one of these animals and plays musical instruments to show why he is worth USD 41000. The donkey also refers to himself as a &jackass8 and talks at length about how Azerbaijan is a fine country for a talented jackass like himself.

16. (SBU) Comment. While physical intimidation of political activists is not a new phenomenon in Azerbaijan, the timing of this incident (one day before Deputy Secretary Steinberg,s visit and coincident with the visit of the PACE Special Rapporteur) is remarkable. Embassy is in personal contact with several witnesses and associates of Milli and Hajizade and will continue to follow the case closely. Embassy intends to raise the issue with the Presidential Administration and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. End Comment.

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